

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 19 May, 2002

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

This will be the last CHURCH STUFF for this year. You will be soon shutting down your computers and packing them away.

I want to thank you all for having played such active roles in the Catholic Program this year and for your continued friendship. It's meant a lot to me, and I wish you all only the very best for the coming summer. May God guide your steps during whatever the summer may bring your way. May He keep you safe and whole and bring you safely through the many roads you'll travel over the next three months.

If you're a FIRSTIE, my wish for you is that you'll experience confidence and a sense of fulfillment in the career which is about to unfold before you. May you retain confidence in yourself, in your powers and talent...and in the constant Presence of God in your lives. May God keep you safe in His powerful embrace.

And now, back to the present...

In the midst of the slavery of TERM-END preparation, let's not forget that this is the Easter-Pentecost season.

Jesus is RISEN and is now beyond time-and-space; the Apostles become "changed men" by the power of the Holy Spirit, and the world is introduced to something brand-new.

Are you a part of it or just an onlooker?

Can you honestly pray in the following words?

Lord,
send Your gift of SPIRIT to fill me.

Touch me
with TRUTH that burns like fire,
with BEAUTY that moves me like the wind;
and SET ME FREE...

FREE to try new ways of living.
FREE to forgive myself and others.
FREE to love and laugh and sing.
FREE to lay aside my burden of security.
FREE to join the battle for justice and peace.
FREE to see and listen and wonder again
at the gracious mystery of things and persons.

FREE to be,
to give,
to receive,

to rejoice as a child of Your SPIRIT.

Let me live life as it ought to be lived...
without FEAR,
without RESENTMENT,
without BLAME,
without HATRED.

Touch me with Your SPIRIT
so that I may REALLY live.

Best wishes as you enter Term-Ends.
May God give you understanding and good recall.

AN EASTER THOUGHT:

THE ASCENSION OF JESUS

Have we ever really listened to Jesus' words:
"My going will be advantageous to you..."(John 16:7);
"Listen, I'm with you to the end..."(Matthew 28:20);
"If I don't go, the Paraclete won't come to you,
but if I do go,
the Spirit of Truth will come and teach you everything..."
(John 16:7 and 13).

And so, in this Easter Season,
we come to the feast of Jesus' ASCENSION
(which the Church celebrated on last Sunday).

Does it mean anything in your life?
Have you ever thought about it?

Here's what one spiritual-writer sees in it:
"The essential teaching of Scripture...
is that Christ, by His Resurrection and Ascension,
has departed from this PRESENT WORLD
corrupted by sin
and destined for destruction,
in order to enter a NEW WORLD...
much more REAL than our present world
because it alone possesses TRUE LIFE.

However, it is vain to seek "where" it is
just as it is wrong to imagine it as "far away".
This NEW WORLD - where Christ awaits us -

is not far from us;
it is not "outside" our world
but TRANSCENDS it.
It is of ANOTHER order.
(P. Benoit, OP)

At the ASCENSION,
Christ didn't "GO AWAY".
He disappeared.
DEPARTURE causes an absence...
while DISAPPEARANCE inaugurates a hidden presence.
On ASCENSION DAY,
Christ became invisible and began sharing His Father's might.
Because of that,
He's closer to us than He ever was before.

He acquired the very influence,
the boundless efficacy,
that enables Him to fill everything with His presence.

His ASCENSION
is not a going-up in space
but a going-up in power.

Christ remain the most ACTIVE person
in the history of the world.

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

BACCALAUREATE MASS

The annual BACCALAUREATE MASS for the
graduating Firsties on Thursday, 30 May, at 1900 at
the Chapel. Uniform is India whites. No tickets are
required; seating is on a "first come, first served"
basis.

DID YOU KNOW?

DAYS OF THE WEEK:

I guess we never think about the days of the week very much, but it doesn't hurt to take
a look at them in a religious setting, because, for the most part, they came from a religious
setting, and, in many cases, they still preserve a religious significance.

The "week of 7 days" originated among the Semitic peoples of the Middle East, and it
was based on a logical sub-division of the 28-day lunar month. In portraying God as

Creator (Genesis 1), it was presumed that everyone who read the story would understand the "7-day week" (God created everything in 6 days and rested on the 7th).

This "7-day week" entered Greek culture, where the days were named after the sun, the moon and the 5 planets visible to the naked eye. These heavenly bodies were presumed to have special powers and were honored as deities.

When the Germanic peoples gained the upper hand in the Roman Empire, they renamed several of the days of the week after their own gods, so the names we use today are a combination of Greek/Roman and Germanic religions:

Sunday	- day of the sun
Monday	- day of the moon ("moon-day")
Tuesday	- Tiw's day (German god of war)
Wednesday	- Woden's day (German high-god)
Thursday	- Thor's day (German high god)
Friday	- Frigg's day (German goddess of love)
Saturday	- day of Saturn (Roman-Etruscan god)

The early Christians emphasized only the first day of the week, the Lord's Day (or "Sunday"). It was not the Sabbath of the Jews (which was Saturday), but it was the day on which Jesus rose from the dead.

On Sundays (or Saturday evenings, which, according to ancient time-keeping, was the beginning of Sunday), these early believers held an elaborate ritual of Scripture readings, prayers, hymns and the Eucharistic memorial of bread and wine.

Wednesdays and Fridays also came to be considered special: Wednesday was supposedly the day on which Judas betrayed Christ (the Wednesday of Holy Week is sometimes called "Spy Wednesday"), and Friday was the day of Jesus' death. By the end of the 1st century, both days came to be days of fasting (or "station-days" - "station" was a Roman military term for "keeping watch").

Some scholars feel that the ancient Christian practice of fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays developed in opposition to the Jewish custom of fasting on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

This tradition of fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays continued for several hundred years and eventually became a part of the Catholic Lenten observance.

Religious traditions associated with weekdays evolved around three activities: PRAYER (either privately or in assembly with other believers in the primitive "home churches" of early times), FASTING and DAILY MASS with seasonal themes or celebrations of the lives of the saints.

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

...everyone preparing to take TEEs, especially those in academic difficulty.

...all our military brothers and sisters - and their families - throughout the world, especially those in areas of risk.

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, could you offer some comments about the current "sexual abuse" crisis

that everyone is hearing so much about?

A: Sure.

It's a painful topic, of course.

I saw a statistic yesterday that said that 176 priests throughout the country have been alleged to have had improper sexual relations with male children over the last 25 years or so. Hopefully, that number won't go any higher.

A very small number seem to have had these relations with young children ("pedophilia"), but the majority are accused of having relations with teenagers ("ephebophilia").

The experts who have written on the subject say that this percentage of priests (they put the figure at 1-1.5%) is lower than in the general population, and I guess that's some good news in the midst of the terrible picture.

And the scenario is complicated by the fact that in many cases, their bishops haven't handled the problem very wisely, although to be fair, many bishops claim that when dealing with these priests, they've relied on the advice of experts, and the advice hasn't always been terribly effective.

So we're left with a mess, and hopefully, the bishops will be able to sort it out when they have their annual meeting in June. The pope made it clear to them that this type of behavior has no place in the priesthood at all and that the victims need to be listened to with deep compassion.

Why would a priest or anyone else abuse children in this way?

Well, I guess I look on it as a sickness, first and foremost. I've heard it said that most people who act in this way have been abused as children themselves...and I heard another statistic that claimed that in our society, between 30% and 40% of children have been sexually abused at one time or another, usually by a relative or someone whom they know well.

So it's a sickness that seems to be fairly prevalent.

I'm not an expert in human behavior, but it seems to me that one of the reasons why people act in this way is because their psychological development has been arrested, and they remain emotionally and psychologically immature, unable to form relationships with their appropriate age-group.

In any case, for a priest to do this is particularly offensive to me because in addition to violating morality in the sexual area, he is also abusing his power and his influence with those members of society who are most vulnerable. In doing that, he warps the whole picture of what a priest is supposed to be.

And that's true of the clergy in other religious traditions too (remember that this isn't just a "Catholic" problem; it's reared its ugly head in just about every religious tradition I can think of in the USA).

Some victims are so psychologically scarred that they will never heal.

Some people simplistically think that if priests were allowed to marry, the problem would be solved, but I don't agree with that because lots of child-abusers in the general population are married, and it hasn't made a difference.

The problem the bishops face has several layers to it:

- a) what to do with the priests who are guilty;
- b) how to deal with the victims;

- c) whether to adopt a "one strike and you're out" policy for the guilty;
- d) figuring out a way to keep sexual-abusers from getting into the priesthood;
- e) where homosexuality fits into all this and how to address it;
- e) how to heal the "black-eye" that the Church has suffered because of this.

So they'll have their hands full at their meeting in June.

In the big picture, I have always believed that every once in a while, large institutions go through a period of "cleaning out", and I think the Catholic Church in the USA will emerge from this a stronger and healthier organization on the human level.

But it looks like in the short run that this will continue to be a painful process.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

SPIRITUAL WARFARE:

This is a term that you seem to hear a lot nowadays, and it comes in a major way from the writings of St. Paul in the New Testament. In his first letter to his young friend Timothy, he says things like

"...fight like a good soldier,
with faith and a good conscience as your weapons" (1:18 and 19)

and

"Fight the good fight of the faith..."(6:12).

or another example from I Corinthians 10:3-4:

"For although we are in the flesh, we do not battle
according to the flesh, for the weapons of our battle
are not of flesh..."

or the more familiar vocabulary as I Thessalonians 5:8 ff:

"But since we are of the day, let us be sober,
putting on the breastplate of faith and love
and the helmet that is hope for salvation..."

or the great exhortation to the Ephesians (6:13 ff):

"Therefore, put on the armor of God, that you may be
able to resist on the evil day...In all circumstances,
hold faith as a shield...and take the helmet of salvation
and the sword of the Spirit..."

These types of references occur at various places in Paul's writings.

His use of "military" terms to describe the spiritual life was based on his belief that the Christian is surrounded by hostile forces which are constantly seeking to undermine goodness in each believer and that "warfare" is the most accurate term to describe the process.

In addition, he believed that there is a definite difference between "flesh" and "spirit". In Romans 7:23, he says this:

"In my inmost self, I dearly love God's law,
but I can see that my body follows a different law
that battles against the law that my reason dictates."

And then in Galatians 5:16 ff, he says this:

"...if you are guided by the spirit, you will be of no

danger of yielding to the flesh...
and in that same passage, he lists the "works" of the flesh (eg, licentiousness, hatred, etc.)
and the "works" of the spirit (eg, peace, kindness, etc).

So for him, if a person wants to live a Christian life, such a person would constantly work to discipline the urges of the "flesh"...but it's important to realize that when he says "flesh", he's not only talking about the physical body or about sex. He's talking about all the urges in our personality that tempt us to ignore the call of God.

Unlike other philosophers of his day, he wasn't interested in condemning the human body; he was interested in helping people to understand that evil can just as easily come from the soul as well as the body...and that the only way to get into sync with God is to constantly struggle to control the evil desires that come from our weak human nature.

So in his writings, he sees life as a real "warfare" - first, against the warped part of our human nature, and then against the invisible powers of evil that are all around us.

Interestingly enough, Jesus didn't use the "warfare" terminology to any great degree; it was Paul who popularised it...and it has become a favorite image of spiritual writers over the centuries.

And it remains a legitimate image too...because "resistance to evil" does indeed become a type of "warfare", if it's taken seriously, and the battleground for each Christian is his or her spirit.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

"The Lord has written
the promise of RESURRECTION
not in books alone,
but on every leaf in Spring-time."
Martin Luther

And that's the way it is, a day like all days, filled with those events that alter and illuminate our time...

and YOU ARE THERE!!

For the summer,
"May God bless you and keep you;
may He turn his face toward you and be gracious to you;
may He look upon you kindly and give you His peace."
Numbers 6:24-6

Take care of yourselves!!!

Woodie